

SALT Pact Described as 'Very Close'

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The State Department indicates that an agreement with the Soviet Union to limit strategic arms is at least one more meeting away.

Secretary of State Cyrus Vance met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin for about an hour and a half on SALT last night with another meeting expected soon.

After the session State Department spokesman, Tom Reston, gave the American reading of the status of the talks to waiting reporters. In what could be the song of SALT, Reston said, "We are closer, closer, very close."

Those were the words Dobrynin used Saturday after meeting with Vance for about 40 minutes. Last night, the Soviet ambassador said only that he would confirm his assessment of Saturday.

Reston said there still are final items to be resolved in a future meeting.

Going into Saturday's session, the outstanding issues involved the definition of what will constitute a new missile type under the SALT pact and a detailed understanding of what kind of behavior would be considered a violation of the pact.

REPORTS CIRCULATING in government yesterday indicated that progress had been made on the new missile issue. It was unclear what further action was necessary on the remaining question, which is part of the issue known by the shorthand description of verification.

The ability of the United States to verify Soviet compliance with treaty provisions has become one of the most important questions in the expected battle to ratify the treaty in the Senate.

The recent loss of CIA-operated electronic listening posts on the Soviet border in Iran has brought that ability into question among many senators, making such alternative monitoring means as satellites more important.

There are indications that the administration is moving to demonstrate its concern for satellite safety with increased attention on a treaty to limit weapons designed to knock out satellites.

The American Broadcasting Co. reported in weekend news broadcasts that the administration is pushing to conclude such a treaty in time to sign it along with the SALT pact.

SOURCES KNOWLEDGABLE about the anti-satellite, or "Asat," negotiations say, however, that talks with the Soviet Union have been stalled. The second round of those talks was concluded in Berne, Switzerland, in February. No real progress was made, sources say.

Difficulties in the negotiations exist within the American government as well as with the Soviets. The Pentagon is not at all sure it wants to limit such systems until it has at least matched what some maintain is a Soviet capability to destroy orbiting satellites.

The United States has not yet tested such a system while the Soviet Union has.